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By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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Filipino-American Groups Hail President Obama's Major Immigration-Reform Speech

Two Filipino-American groups hailed Friday (July 2) a major policy speech of President Barack Obama that calls for immigration reform that is being "held hostage to political posturing and special-interest wrangling – and to the pervasive sentiment in Washington that tackling such a thorny-and-emotional issue is inherently bad politics."

On one hand, Migrant Heritage Commission based in Washington, D.C., said, "President Obama's speech is very timely for the celebration of the American Independence Day. Let us honor our great nation on July 4th, our brave-and-committed American soldiers that include thousands of immigrants. A comprehensive Immigration Reform now is good for the economy and enriches the cultural heritage of

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America

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On the other hand, the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) said, "We are heartened by President Obama's strong statement today to keep his promise to make immigration reform a reality this year."

MHC executive director Arnedo Valera, Esq., said, "the broken immigration system only foments racial bias and promotes discriminatory practices against various ethnic groups. It also makes undocumented immigrants vulnerable to illegal recruiters, unscrupulous employers and subjects them to the potential dangers of human trafficking."

FILIPINOS HAVE THE LONGEST WAITING TIME

"Filipinos have the longest waiting time for petitions to be approved and are thus adversely affected by protracted delays in visa processing," according to Greg Macabenta, NaFFAA's national chair.

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“But family members waiting to reunite with their loved ones aren’t the only ones affected by this broken system. Undocumented immigrants who have been here to seek a better life for themselves and their children are adversely affected as well. It’s imperative, therefore, that we use our voices and our votes to urge our national leaders to act boldly and decisively now.”

Mr. Obama delivered an important speech at American University in Washington, DC, Thursday (July 1) to call on Congress to act swiftly to reform our immigration system.

In his speech, the President has acknowledged the critical contribution of immigrants has made as well as the “broken and dangerous” immigration system that “offends the most-basic American values.”

BORDER SECURITY AND PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

MHC agrees with the President that the broken immigration system cannot be fixed by focusing alone on border security but has to include a path to legalization for the undocumented immigrants, which are now 11-million people.

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"We support the call for a practical, common sense approach to our broken immigration system that both secures the borders and establishes a path to legalization. The Comprehensive Immigration Reform should be founded on fairness and social justice rooted on American values to which this great American nation was founded," Atty. Valera, an immigration lawyer by profession, said.

He said, the MHC affirmed the fundamental belief that America is a nation of immigrants. "It was before and it will always be," Mr. Valera said.

Mr. Macabenta also notes that many Filipino World War II veterans who had filed petitions for their children have passed away, thus voiding the petitions and depriving their children of immigration benefits.

Proposed immigration bills include a provision to exempt eligible children of Filipino veterans from numerical limitations and expedite their visa applications.

Early this year, Filipinos and Filipino Americans marched in Washington with thousands of immigrant rights supporters to push Congress to enact just, humane and compassionate immigration reform legislation.

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“We need to keep raising our voices loudly and demand moral leadership on this critical issue,” adds NaFFAA National Vice Chair Rozita Lee. “We must remind America that we are a nation of immigrants, that regardless of where we came from and how we came here, our shared values strengthen and enrich America’s culture and global standing as a beacon of hope around the world.”

“We reaffirm the belief as stated by President Obama that immigrants are engines of global economy and beacon of hope. A comprehensive immigration reform now is an effective response to the phenomenon of global migration and the current global economic crisis. Human beings are our resources to build a great nation,” Valera said.

BIPARTISAN BILL CAME APART

President Obama said, “Just a few years ago, when I was a senator, we forged a bipartisan coalition in favor of comprehensive reform. Under the leadership of Senator Kennedy, who had been a longtime champion of immigration reform, and Senator John McCain, we worked across the aisle to help pass a bipartisan bill through the Senate. But that effort eventually came apart.

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“And now, under the pressures of partisanship and election-year politics, many of the 11 Republican senators who voted for reform in the past have now backed away from their previous support. Ultimately, our nation, like all nations, has the right and obligation to control its borders and set laws for residency and citizenship. And no matter how decent they are, no matter their reasons, the 11 million who broke these laws should be held accountable.

“Now, if the majority of Americans are skeptical of a blanket amnesty, they are also skeptical that it is possible to round up and deport 11 million people. They know it's not possible. Such an effort would be logistically impossible and wildly expensive. Moreover, it would tear at the very fabric of this nation — because immigrants who are here illegally are now intricately woven into that fabric. Many have children who are American citizens. Some are children themselves, brought here by their parents at a very young age, growing up as American kids, only to discover their illegal status when they apply for college or a job.

“Migrant workers — mostly here illegally — have been the labor force of our farmers and agricultural producers for generations. So even if it was possible, a program of mass deportations would disrupt our economy and communities in ways that most Americans would find intolerable.” # # #

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